DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 076 447 SO 005 463

AUTHOR	Fair, Jean
TITLE	The Choice Before Us.
PUB DATE	23 Nov 72
NOTE	23p.; Presidential Address presented at the Annual Meeting of the National Council for the Social Studies (Boston, Massachusetts, November 23, 1972)
EDRS PRICE	MF-$0.65 HC-$3.29
DESCRIPTORS	*Educational Change; *Educational Improvement; Educational Needs; Educational Philosophy; Relevance (Education); *Social Change; *Social Studies; Speeches; *Values
IDENTIFIERS	*National Council Social Studies

ABSTRACT

Social studies educators need to make an effort to influence the shape of change in social education and schools to further the abilities of all. This influence can occur by choosing new directions, new priorities, and by reinterpreting values. The choice is to build upon what still has promise out of the past and to reformulate directions and institutions. Social studies educators need to be clear about the meaning of social studies education itself; recognize that social studies education is for all students and provide opportunities for all to learn with satisfaction and success; and recognize that relevant social studies education occurs in social contexts. Deliberate alternatives for diversity can offer a choice for educational improvement within schools which usually reflect patterns of individualization, fixed schedules, hierarchy of power, and uniformity. In conclusion, by thoughtful, courageous, and resolute choice social studies educators can make a difference in classrooms, in schools, and then perhaps, in society. (Author/SJM)

Presidential Address
Boston, November 23, 1972
Annual N.C.S.S. meeting

U S DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
OFFICE OF EDUCATION
THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL OFFICE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY

The Choice Before Us

1972 President of the National Council for the Social Studies and Professor of Education, Wayne State University

Jean Fair

ED 076447

The theme of this annual meeting makes a statement and asks a question: "We live in a revolution. Is social studies with it?" This is a period of pervasive, even revolutionary, social change. It is uncertain that society, or the institutions of education, or social studies education in particular are with it.

The enormous growth of knowledge and method in the natural and social sciences and their translation in technology have given rise to a frequently expressed belief that men may now control their own destinies, may make their own futures what they will. I can understand, even at times share, in this vision of man, lord of the earth and beyond. It is a glorious vision, but one that expects more than is likely to be fulfilled in our lifetimes or even those of the young in our schools. It is a vision which for the immediate future can lead to the arrogant assumption of power by a self-appointed elite, or as utopia fails to appear in short order, to disillusionment and withdrawal, or to the comforting but unwarranted belief that the good life for all will appear as a straight line projection of present trends, that more of the same will result in a qualitative difference and for the better.

Yet neither are people blind and helpless creatures to be buffeted about by circumstance or imprisoned by the forces of unexamined tradition. People may have some influence over

FILMED FROM BEST AVAILABLE COPY

their present and their future, may at least shape, if not determine, the course of their lives and the pervasive changes in society.

I am sure that social studies education and the schools will be permeated by these changes. It can not be otherwise. But I am not sure of whether social studies education is with it. I do not know whether we can summon the practical intelligence, the insight, and the will needed to deal creatively with reality. I am convinced that social studies educators should make the effort to change social education and the schools to further the abilities of all, and especially the young, to influence, if they can not wholly determine, the shape of change. I am convinced that social studies educators should make a conscious, thoughtful, and resolute choice to do so.

Change in our times is not superficial but basic. Moreover, forces which have led to conditions desired by many have also led to conditions undesired by many. The economic system has made the majority increasingly affluent, while the proportion of poor has remained steady. Nor do present trends in the new industrial state assure us that poverty will be eliminated merely through continued economic growth. While many of the newly affluent continue to acquire and presumably enjoy a mass of new products, others have come to realize that material things do not necessarily bring happiness. Those at

the bottom end of the economic ladder are less likely to accept the necessity and inevitability of their lot.

Continued growth or even stability in the economic system as it now operates is predicated upon the acceptance of obsolescence -- buyers will continue to buy new models of automobiles, military hardware, and products in throw-away packages -- and upon the custon of accounting for what are called production costs but not for social costs -- what is discarded costs government money to haul away; industrial wastes and detergents pollute our waters; and constant moving onward to outer city and suburban areas leaves the inner cities hardly able to maintain the decencies of everyday living. Present production contribute to the deterioration of the environment, proceeding rapidly enough to justify concern for what can be passed on to succeeding generations and even to present generations.

Moves to the cities or other attractive areas have meant better jobs and more desirable places to live, more stimulating, and less constricted by the narrowness of fixed, provincial worlds, more scenic or without dismal weather, Yet pressure, inconvenience, impersonality, social distance, and the blandness of suburbs have become characteristic of urban life.

Opportunities for better education, jobs with satisfaction or greater income, at least the hope and often the realization

of satisfying personal associations and status are now possible for many. Yet merely more of these opportunities do not end the practices of institutionalized racism. Racism continues to deny to Blacks, Chicanos, Puerto Ricans, Native American Indians, and many of Oriental extraction the pursuit of happiness open to whites, even the human dignity which all persons prize.

While we hope for a generation of peace, new names to old policies have not extricated us from waste, destruction, and death in Viet Nam, nor ended the country's contradictions in conscience. If the balance of terror has so far averted catastrophe, that system is little more than a modern sword of Damocles and hardly promises a continuation of civilization.

Even the political system, long a source of pride, seems ineffective and unresponsive, often lacking in credibility. Content with increases in private wealth means too little for the public sector, which falters in a time of need.

To influence the shape of things does not mean, then, to adjust to or take control of more of the same, and faster. It is not merely running faster on the same old treadmill just to keep in place. To influence the shape of things means choice and shift in directions: reinterpretation of values and new priorities. It means reorganization; it means dislodging people from those spots which have the comfort of familiarity and moving from the known to the unknown. Under such circumstances it is difficult to maintain security, to know who we are, to

achieve integrity. Yet there can be no going back to the safe ground, for the ground has shifted and is no longer firm under foot.

If there is change in society, however, there is also continuity. The expectation of dealing with change is ingrained in American culture; it is possible to build with that expectation. Although perenially threatened, free speech is still a cherished right, and the means of communicating ideas are at hand. The use of knowledge and methods of inquiry is increasingly an integral part of the ways this society functions; if reliance upon the social sciences is shaky, social science by now is for real. This culture has long had a reservoir of organizational know-how and much practice in accommodating divergent interests. The recognition of pluralism, "one out of many," has a long history. The people of this country have combined a belief in a government for the people with a healthy fear of political tyranny. However imperfect in operation, belief in open opportunity is still strong and under pragmatic necessities in a society characterized by interdependence likely to be with us. And love and brotherhood are not values invented by the young. These and more are positive aspects of our society with which it is possible to to influence the course of change.

There is some rhythm of challenge and response in social affairs. Underneath apparent calm comes an accumulation of change which in time surfaces. Some clamor early for reform

and seem radical. Shouting, frustration, bewilderment, and even violence occur. New proposals are difficult to accept, and indeed the sorting of wheat from chaff is incomplete. Yet accommodation to changed reality is necessary. If ideas of reform and their implementation are shut off, injustice mounts and the social system becomes rigid and stagnant, or unworkable. Although this course may be the outcome in the years ahead, it is not inevitable. Amidst confusion and vacillation, amidst pretense that all is well and not much need be noticed, new ideas and practices come to appear less threatening and more sensible. Reforms are adopted and practices revised. If at times they seem changes broad enough to sweep through every nook and cranny of this country, they are as often less spectacular. New ideas come into practice, they actually happen in concrete and local situations. Which of these courses or some others will follow now is yet uncertain.

Still concern and ambiguity are conditions of hope as well as of anxiety and unease. And hope is the base of thoughtful resolve put to action. Social studies educators can not influence the shape of change by expecting to adjust to more of the same nor by lapsing into happy optimism that everything will somehow come out in the wash. Instead we must choose to build on what still has promise out of our past and choose to reformulate directions and institutions. Because of the nature of the social studies field we must do so with thought for the relation of

society at large to education in our classrooms and to the institutions of schools.

First, then, social studies educators have to be clear about the meaning of social studies education itself. It is all too easy to step right up with the crowd for our bottle of the patent medicine which cures all ills. (And parenthetically in this crowd will be educators in all sorts of fields and a substantial proportion of the public as well.) The rush for the cure-all moves on from endorsing the disciplines of the social sciences and history to intensely personalized and individually structured search as the backbone of social studies education. Cognitive learning has its day to be succeded by the affective. Enrichment programs for the academically talented, programmed learning, television, team teaching, continuous progress, and performance objectives, one after the other have their popularity.

Much of the base of social studies education was formulated forty years or more ago. It is not to downgrade today's theory and practice to point to the sluggishness with which improved social studies education comes into being, sluggishness accounted for in part by failure to keep clear on the nature of social studies education and to see it as a whole.

A year ago the National Council published a set of Guidelines for Social Studies Curriculum, pointing to four aspects of social studies education: a) knowledge, especially

the concepts and generalizations from a broad range of fields which have power for interpreting the real social world; b) abilities, especially in thinking but also in all those skills necessary for finding evidence including reading, and in human relations; c) the process of valuing, and d) the use of all of these in social participation. While it may be advantagious to explore the meaning of any one of these aspects or even some part thereof, pushing one out of context with the others means spinning our wheels without forward movement. Each of these four aspects nourishes the others. They are integrally related.

Second, social studies education is for all students. It is not be be crowded out by emphasis on reading, although all young people are entitled to learn to read well, or by emphasis on vocational career education, or by any other field of popularity. Nor should social education be starved out by inadequate instructional materials, incompetent teachers and administrators, or the deadening pattern of deary recitation of discrete and so meaningless facts. All students -- and I do mean all, not just those who are affluent, or intellectually able, or white, or interested enough to elect it, or successful at whatever schools have conventionally defined as important -- all students are entitled to opportunities in social education. This is not to say that there is to be one, same program in any one school for all students. It is to say that all students are entitled to the knowledge which makes the social world more

nearly manageable, to experiences which foster their abilities to think for themselves and to form decent human relations, to clarify their own values, and to translate all of these into action inside and outside of school as participating members of society.

Third, social studies education occurs in social contexts and can hardly be conceived outside of them. Coming to understand, for example, that cultural patterns in other areas of the world are not like those in America; or that sub-cultural patterns in this country, indeed among those in one's own classroom, are not those already taken for granted as right; or that one's very own values are to be faced and examined means challenge and perhaps threat. Students need support to accept themselves and to accord respect to others. Freedom to inquire depends not only on whether teachers promote it, but whether fellow students give a hearing, without pressure for conforming to accepted stances. Classroom climate must be encouraging and open.

Parent and community understanding are part of the social context. More parents might endorse classroom activities fostering conceptualization rather than accumulation of information, for example, if opportunities were there to see the merits of the former. More parents might feel more comfortable if they could see that students were as individuals to decide for themselves and that no one right answered was in actuality foisted off on all. More parents might rest assured if their children reported

social studies as something really good.

Teachers and administrators, in turn, must listen with attention to what parents and others in the community want for their children, to what seems out of kilter or in. Social studies classrooms are not always as they ought to be. The dangers of separation from the social world around are all too real. Communication, frequent, open, and honest discussion, fosters the search for mutual trust.

Yet in a time when change comes too fast for some, when many see only dimly or can not agree on what they want from schools, real education in social studies is disturbing. The public's hackles rise and teachers pressured to stick to what seems safe. It is then that social studies teachers and other educators must support each other. It is not that they can stick to the line that teachers and schools are always right; they are not. Much of the turmoil in schools comes from plain fact that they are not. Social studies teachers especially need to think their way through these conflict situations. What must be supported through organized effort is the principle of freedom to teach and learn and the endeavors of colleagues and students who act on that principle.

Social studies education which aims honestly at developing capabilities for influencing the shape of change can not be conceived fully as formal curriculum. Students learn from what may be called informal curriculum, the ways things go

day to day in our classrooms and schools. If knowledge is actually important, then ideas and evidence have to be put to use in the everyday situations of our classrooms. If it is a right and responsibility to inquire, to learn to think for oneself, then social studies classrooms must be open to all kinds of matters. If knowledge and thought and valuing are to be taken seriously, along with hope for the world around us, then young people in our classrooms must expect to grapple with racism, the troubles of our cities, war and peace, poverty, the deterioration of the environment, and the face-to-face difficulties in personal relations. If participation is to be taken seriously, then getting in the act must be possible and practical.

If social studies education is to be for all students, there must be decent opportunities for all to learn with reasonable satisfaction and success. The life ways of minority group young people must be as acceptable in classrooms as those of whites. What is open must be for boys and girls. Especially in social studies classrooms are all students to be treated with the dignity and respect without which any social education becomes meaningless.

Students must have a chance to live by the ways they learn about. If social studies education were like this, schools would be different places.

But if schools were different places, social studies educators could more likely do these things.

Effort in the improvement of education has ordinarily focused more on individuals than on schools as institutions. Pre-certification programs in colleges and universities including their cooperating classroom teachers; special institutes funded by government and curriculum development projects; in-service education in school systems or graduate university programs; articles published for teachers and administrators in books and magazines; clinics, demonstrations, and discussions at national, regional, and state social studies meetings and those of other professional associations all aim to improve individual competence. Curriculum programs state objectives in terms of what individual students are to achieve. These illustrations are familiar to all. The assumption that more competent individuals make for better education in social studies is, of course, quite proper. In the end, it is individuals who learn, individuals who act, individuals who live out their lives with varying degrees of fulfillment. Individual teachers, individual students, administrators, and parents can make a difference. Individual social studies educators -- many here at this meeting -- give time, energy, and thought to doing what each can do. What they do does matter.

Yet schools are not simply collections of individuals; they are social institutions. They have a role in society; they are also small societies in themselves. Schools have means of

social control, norms, procedures, roles, ways of apportioning ascribed status and achieved status, and all the other trappings of social institutions. I do not intend to suggest that the institutional press is identical from school to school, although in broad outline there is more commonality than is ordinarily noticed. I do intend to suggest that institutional press, how things regularly go in each school, exerts a powerful influence on the opportunities open for improving social studies education and on the very roles social studies educators assume in promoting desirable change. If social studies education is to be "with it" in an era of pervasive change, social studies educators must join with others in thoughtful, resolute choice to get about not only the improvement of individual social competencies but the reorganization of schools as social units.

One aspect of school life is the focus on individuals, even when they are dealt with impersonally. Achievement in schools is held to be an individual affair, and rewards for achievement in the form of marks go to individuals not groups. Individuals are expected to do something called "their own work", rather than the work of some group (even through at times they work in groups.) Teachers also are to do "their own work" (although team teaching is beginning to change that pattern). Teachers too get individual ratings, although after the first few years these matter less.

What would happen in social studies education if students were rewarded at least some of the time as groups? In many schools it is still a big thing to be on the football or basketball team. What would happen if groups of students were rewarded -- and with the coin of the school realm, marks, if these are to be awarded for individual achievement, although I prefer other rewards for group undertakings: collecting paper for reprocessing; cleaning up a local vacant lot; running a weekly recreation night in a local hospital for the emotionally ill, keeping track of instructional materials in use in the classroom? Would the problems of group interaction become sufficiently live to be dealt with seriously? Would the requirements of common endeavor foster the examination of new kinds of social controls?

Everybody knows that students and teachers spend their school days with others. Solitude and privacy are sparse indeed in school. Students and teachers are ordinarily assigned to classes, and hence their associates during much of the school day. Assignments of associates are largely made by chance: the number of eight-year olds who show up for third grade or of high school students who must take U.S. History. Friendship groups; personally chosen, boy and girl pairs; ethnic groups; and the school social class structure reflecting, but not identical with, that of the school community, also exist, almost independently of the pattern of assigned associates. Moreover, students are

customarily segregated by age: eleven-year olds are in the sixth grade -- it is a disgrace to be "behind" and a social hazard to be "ahead" -- fifteen year-olds in the tenth grade or sophomores in high school; even college seniors have little to do with freshmen. Teachers knew, long before researchers confirmed it, that peer groups have enormous influence on what goes on in school. Peer groups and social structures are social phenomena and should be dealt with in social studies education.

In place of reliance on circumstance, fortuitous or otherwise, schools might give some thought to making more out of the patterns of association. Special interest groups might allow children of different ages and adults, and those of various ethnic groups as well, to meet on common ground and school time, be it for music or museum trips, or neighborhood projects. Older students might be expected at times to look after those younger; refereeing baseball games, tutoring, pitching in at day care centers. School might set up some conference days, attendance voluntary, specifically aiming to see that sets of students heard each other, Chicanos and whites, for example, or suburbanites and inner city.

Teachers too are assigned. However much they may get satisfaction from their students, after years of association, each day almost entirely with students, they feel the need of stimulation, and someone to talk to. Team teaching, or teams

of individual teachers each trying out something in his own classroom to report on regularly to his group helps to change that pattern. And what would come of a teachers' lounge where custom said that students were not to be discussed?

The school day is ordinarily scheduled, less so at elementary and more so at secondary levels. Waiting within the schedule is as ordinary as being cut off in midstream. To ameliorate waiting and cutting off, much of school activity is planned in modules, what can be set up and finished, as it were, in forty minutes. Given amounts of material are to be covered or given activities completed in so many days. The schedule of any one day is much like that of every other day of the school year, and when variations occur, something is held to be amiss. Many norms of behavior and customary procedures are developed to accommodate the conditions of the schedule.

What would schools be like if schedules were more flexible? Class sessions could meet for longer blocks of time for, let us imagine, three days a week. Or the school term could be interspersed with occasional weeks of special projects or special mini-courses. More open space schools reduce the need for mass exchange of students at the ringing of the bells. And why must the school day run from nine to three, give and take an hour-or-so's variation? Why must all students be there at the same hours? What might happen if school days ran ten hours and

only some of the students there at stipulated hours? It is not that any of these proposals in itself deserves endorsement. But as people made the school schedules rigid, people can make the schedules flexible.

Still another feature of the pattern of the schools is the expectation of uniformity. Although efforts at individualization have had at least some modest, in some places splendid success, still students in schools and in their social studies classes are expected to do pretty much what others do. Even individualized learning programs often assume that students are to learn much the same things, simply at their own rates. Textbooks and other curricular programs are still adopted system-wide or at least for the school as a whole. Curriculum innovation even in social studies often appears in the form of additions or special projects, dropped all too often when special funding runs out; innovation is extra, not to disturb the regular, not reorganization of the ordinary. Many a new teacher has learned the hard way to fit into what goes on in the building. Students eat in a mass lunchroom, teachers in their own, and everybody knows in advance what eighth grade or eleventh grade social studies is all about. And everybody knows too that schooling happens inside the four walls of the school.

What would happen if the schools reflected somewhat better the increasing richness and diversity of society at large by offering more choice? It is unnecessary that all students focus on a common topic or problem all of the time.

And when the focus is in common, some of the time, diversity can be had in instructional materials, learning activities, and points of view. Why must educators look for the one best social studies program for the school? Why not several programs instead? Suppose that students, increasingly as they grow in maturity, were expected to choose within some broad guidelines among social studies courses and teachers. Perhaps those not chosen might be pushed into improvement or oblivion, and students more satisfied with the consequences. The converse might also be an interesting wrinkle; teachers might at least some of the time be allowed to choose some social studies offerings of their own or even the students with whom they could agree to work. Or suppose that more schools were made of schools within the school, each with some basic variation in program; or that students and their parents might decide upon which school of several schools to attend. Suppose that at least some of the time students were outside the building into the social world around them. What would that mean for social studies education?

An important condition of freedom is the recognition on all sides of the possibility of pulling up stakes and trying somewhere else. Attendance at school is required not only as a means to a place in society, but until sixteen years of age by law. How can schools capitalize upon choice to mitigate compulsion?

A last of the characteristics of schools as institutions has to do with matters of power and decision. Power and a share in decision-making are ordinarily, and surely officially,

distributed from the top down. Administrators have more than teachers, and teachers more than students. While pressure groups in the community do and at times exert control, neither parents nor others commonly have much say. And the organization, it is tempting to use the term "system," may have more to do with social studies education and what goes on in schools than any of these groups. Many of the ways of schools are not formally decided upon by anyone; they are there by custom or unexamined expediency.

Power and a share in decision-making ought not then to be conceived as a zero-sum game, where some must lose that others gain. If more sorts of persons had more share in deciding more matters, more people might learn from their experiences. The process of reformulation in education and especially in social studies education might be facilitated. In many schools the question of whether moneys are to be spent for a textbook rather than for a variety of curricular programs, or instructional materials, or for social studies education at all is never actually up for discussion. No regularized channels for raising the question exist; hardly anybody can move, not even those at the top. When the rules of the game are insufficiently open to inspection, several games go on concurrently, between teachers and administrators, between students and teachers. The rules of the game that foster education are hardly in play. The field of decision-making need not be a fixed pie in which larger slices to some mean smaller slices for others; the field may truly become a bigger and bigger pie.

Suppose that schools each as a unit, although in relation to larger units, worked out regularized channels and informal ways of involving administrators, teachers, students, others on school staffs who provide their services, parents and the school community in how things should go in school. How should voice and influence be weighted when some are still young and others less immediately involved in daily living of the school? And how should the interests of the broader social world be represented in the local school? It is hard to say. Yet it is worth thinking about what might be opened up for thought and action.

What processes and procedures will be needed: representative assemblies, real student councils, forums and ad hoc committess, grievance panels, ombudsmen, neutral mediators, conferences, opinion samples, regularized classroom consideration of issues and cases? Not much imagination has yet been put to needed practices.

All sorts of concerns have to be up for examination: curriculum, playground rules, the school schedule, instructional materials, assemblies, the school paper, whatever is of concern: and it must be examination with accounting for both circumstances and consequences.

The decision-making processes will have to be carried on with due recognition for the worth of knowledge and methods of inquiry. They come from insightful and systematic search and capability to explain, and not from hollowed misconception, arbitrary preference, or simple majority vote. Children and

society at large are entitled to expect that what is learned in social studies and in other fields can be counted on as useful and that the processes of education in practice are decently trustworthy. All that is, in the end, what students go to school for.

The decision-making process will have to be carried on with due recognition that some rules of the game, the ways it is supposed to go, must exist and in some form reasonably acceptable to those involved; without that identification, it is hardly possible to "go" at all.

The decision-making processes will have to be carried on with due recognition of the spirit of search and of fresh venture. There is no prior assurance that what has been known to be best will be what the schools will become. But prior assurance has never been the basis of good social studies education. Rather has it been the growth of ability to cope with a changing social world. That kind of social studies education will depend in large measure upon the directions and practices of the schools of which it is part and parcel, and can, in turn, exert its own influence.

Social studies educators can make a difference, as individuals and as members of organized, active groups, in their own classrooms and in the reformulation of their schools. They can make a difference by thoughtful, courageous, and resolute choice. There is no going back in a time of change. I quote, I believe, Will Rogers, "Education ain't what it used to be - and never was" --and never will be. The choices before us are

those of what to make it, what directions, what reorganizations.

I use Lincoln's words. "The dogma of the quiet past are inadequate to the stormy present. The occasion is piled high with difficulty, and we must rise with the occasion. As our case is new, so we must think anew, so we must act anew. We must disenthrall ourselves..." We may then find the way for ourselves, for the young, and for society.

I have held it a privilege to be your President. It has been a deeply rewarding experience. I have tried to represent you well. I thank you all for the opportunities to talk with you with you all over this country and for the service so many of you have offered to the National Council and to the improvement of social studies education. I hope you will join your friends and those who may become your friends and the officers of the National Council and the Michigan Council at the reception which follows now in the Commonwealth Room of this hotel.